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ABSTRACT

The development of humanistic psychology has stimulated research that supports the importance of life esteem, or the way people view meaning and purpose in their lives. The Life Esteem survey is a self-report questionnaire designed to measure the four components of life esteem (framework, perspective, commitment, quality) and to assess the relative importance of 22 life goals. To examine differences and consistencies in life esteem among different people, the Life Esteem survey was administered to five groups: 304 public school teachers (mean age 42.0), 86 working adults (mean age 34.4), 30 male university religion students (mean age 24.4), 181 advanced university undergraduates (mean age 23.6), and 24 university undergraduates (mean age 21.4). The results showed that the religion students scored significantly higher for all four components of life esteem than did the other groups. Different groups rated different goals as highest: teachers rated "Belonging" as the highest goal, general adults chose "Individualize" and "Achievement," religion students chose "Religion," and both groups of undergraduates chose "Understanding." These results support the feasibility and potential usefulness of measuring life esteem in individuals. (The 22 life goals and their definitions are included.) (NRB)

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Life Esteem: Quantitative and Qualitative Differences

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Running Head: LIFE ESTEEM

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Abstract

Life Esteem was operationally defined as the way people view meaning and purpose in their lives and consists of four components: framework, perspective, commitment, and quality. These components were measured in five different groups of people and the differences and consistencies between these groups were presented. The relative scores given by the different groups to 22 possible life goals was also compared and discussed. The results indicated the feasibility and potential usefulness of measuring life esteem in individuals.

Life Esteem: Quantitative & Qualitative Differences

The concepts that people have about meaning and purpose in their lives has traditionally been a topic of philosophy and religion; however, the development of humanistic and existential psychologies has stimulated research that scientifically supports the structure and importance of these concepts. Many studies have been published about "purpose in life" based on work by Viktor Frankl (1965) and James Crumbaugh (1973) that emphasized the quantity or degree to which a person feels such a life purpose. Other studies about personal values and goal orientations based on work by Milton Rokeach (1973) and Abraham Maslow (1971) emphasized the quality or nature of a person's life goal. The purpose of the study reported here was to analyze the differences and consistencies for five different groups of people as measured by a questionnaire developed to specify both the quantitative and qualitative aspects of life goals.

The Life Esteem survey is an objectively scored self-report questionnaire developed to measure four components of the view a person has about meaning and purpose in life: framework which is the degree one feels there is a major goal or set of goals; perspective which is how satisfied one is about life; commitment which is the degree one is involved with or concerned about meaning in life; and quality which is the association of one's goal orientation with "healthy" characteristics (Wheeler, 1977). In addition to scores for each of the four components, the relative importance for each of 22 possible life goals is scored on a scale of 1-9 with 1 being the highest. The 22 goals are listed with their definitions in Table 1. Studies have been conducted demonstrating retest reliability, internal consistency reliability, construct validity, and social desirability relationships.

The oldest and largest group studied consisted of 304 teachers with a

mean age of 42.0 in a large urban public school district (84 males and 213 females reported). The next oldest group consisted of 86 working adults with a mean age of 34.4 entering physical fitness programs (26 males and 59 females reported). A group of religious scholastics at a major Jesuit University consisting of 30 males had a mean age of 24.4. A group of advanced undergraduate students at the same university consisting of 65 males and 116 females had a mean age of 23.6. One other group consisting of 11 male and 13 female students at the same university attending a required course in general psychology had a mean age 21.4.

Scores of the four components for the five groups are summarized in Table 2. Table 3 shows the components with statistically significant differences between groups as determined from multiple groups T-tests at an overall alpha level of .05 for each component. Religious students scored significantly higher for all four components than the other groups.

Table 3 also shows the groups that scored goals significantly different overall as determined by the Mann-Whitney test for an alpha level of .05. Table 4 which summarizes the way the groups scored individual goals indicates some interesting differences. Groups scored the following goals as highest: Teachers-Belonging, General Adults-Individualation, Religious Students-Religion, and other students-Understanding. The smallest standard deviations were for the Religious Students. The goals with largest standard deviations were Religion and Transcendence for all groups except Religious Students.

The major result of this exploratory study was a demonstration of the feasibility for measuring both the amount and description of a person's sense of purpose in life. The obvious differences between groups were supported by score differences, indicating a usefulness in analyzing more subtle

differences. Potential usefulness is also indicated for analyzing differences between individual's characteristics and the relationship of those characteristics with health and well-being.

References

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Table 1
Possible Life Goals

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1. PRODUCTION: To make things or contribute by producing goods.
 2. FREEDOM: To be able to do what I want regardless of consequences.
 3. UNDERSTANDING: To acquire wisdom and knowledge.
 4. EQUALITY: To develop fair & impartial treatment for everyone.
 5. EXCITEMENT: To have thrilling & stimulating activity.
 6. SERVICE: To benefit, help or improve people or nature.
 7. PLEASURE: To do things that are pleasurable.
 8. HARMONY: To produce order, peace & balance in the world.
 9. EXPRESSION: To communicate ideas & things I feel are important.
 10. SUPERIORITY: To be recognized as having more or being better than others.
 11. ECONOMIC: To obtain wealth, possessions & material goods.
 12. BENEVOLENCE: To give love, affection & companionship to others.
 13. BEAUTY: To be able to percieve & enjoy beauty.
 14. TRANSCENDENCE: To fill requirements for salvation, union, atonement, etc.
 15. RELIGION: To live in accordance with belief in a supreme being.
 16. AESTHETICS: To contribute and stimulate beauty.
 17. BELONGING: To have love, affection & companionship from another.
 18. EXISTENCE: To contioue my life efficiently, making the most of situations.
 19. JUSTICE: To be treated with fairness, honesty & equality.
 20. ACHIEVEMENT: To produce results providing a sense of accomplishment.
 21. INDIVIDUALIZATION: To find and develop my own potential.
 22. PROCREATION: To perpetuate certain ideas or physical characterists.
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Table 2
Component Scores

	Teachers		General Adults		Advanced Students		Religious ² Students		General Students	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Framework	46.8	6.8	47.3	6.9	49.7	7.4	57.4	2.3	46.0	6.5
Perspective	44.0	8.0	44.9	7.6	47.6	7.5	51.2	5.4	45.0	6.2
Commitment	42.7	6.7	43.4	7.0	47.2	7.0	53.5	4.4	43.9	5.9
Quality	42.3	7.1	41.0	10.1	42.0	8.6	52.6	4.8	38.5	7.9
TOTAL	175.8		176.6		185.5		214.4		171.8	
Age	42.0	11.1	34.4	9.8	23.6	6.5	24.4	2.9	21.4	5.3
N	305		86		181		30		24	
Male- ¹	84-213		26-59		65-116		30-0		11-13	
Female										

1. Not all participants responded for gender.

2. Religious Students were significantly higher than all other groups on all scores at $\alpha < .05$.

Table 3
Significant Group Differences
 $\alpha < .05$

Teachers	-----				
General Adults		-----			
Religious Students	FPCQ	FPCQ	-----		
Advanced Students	FPC	PC	FPCQG	-----	
General Students	G	F Q	FPCQ	F G	-----
	Teachers	General Adults	Religious Students	Advanced Students	General Students

F = Framework

P = Perspective

C = Commitment

Q = Quality

G = Goals

Table 4
Life Goals Scores

	Teachers		General Adults		Advanced Students		Religious Students		General Students	
	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD	M	SD
Belonging	2.3	1.7	2.3	1.7	1.9	1.2	3.2	1.5	2.9	1.9
Understanding	2.4	1.6	2.3	1.4	1.7	.9	2.5	.9	2.5	1.9
Individualize	2.4	1.5	2.2	1.4	2.0	1.3	3.9	1.7	3.0	2.1
Justice	2.4	1.6	2.7	1.3	2.5	1.5	4.7	1.8	4.0	2.0
Achievement	2.4	1.5	2.2	1.4	2.5	1.6	5.0	2.0	2.9	2.0
Benevolence	2.5	1.8	2.4	1.6	1.9	1.0	1.7	.6	2.6	1.7
Existence	2.5	1.6	2.9	1.6	2.8	1.7	4.6	2.0	3.6	2.0
Service	2.8	1.9	3.2	2.0	2.2	1.3	1.9	.5	3.0	2.0
Expression	2.9	1.8	2.9	1.6	2.5	1.4	2.6	1.2	4.5	2.1
Equality	2.9	2.0	3.4	2.1	2.8	1.7	2.5	.9	3.8	2.0
Beauty	3.0	1.8	3.0	1.6	3.2	1.8	2.8	1.1	3.8	1.8
Religion	3.2	2.7	3.3	2.6	3.8	2.8	1.3	.4	4.2	2.9
Harmony	3.3	2.0	3.8	2.1	3.2	2.0	2.8	1.0	4.5	2.0
Pleasure	3.5	1.9	3.6	1.9	3.4	1.9	5.9	1.5	3.7	2.0
Aesthetics	3.8	2.1	3.8	2.0	4.2	2.2	3.1	1.4	4.6	2.1
Transcendence	4.2	3.8	4.7	2.7	4.3	2.7	2.3	1.8	5.0	2.6
Excitement	4.3	2.3	4.4	2.2	3.8	2.0	5.4	2.0	4.3	2.1
Procreation	4.9	2.4	4.9	2.5	4.8	2.2	5.4	2.4	6.4	2.1
Economic	5.0	2.3	5.1	2.6	5.6	2.4	8.7	.5	5.3	3.0
Production	5.5	2.5	5.6	2.2	5.6	2.4	6.0	2.3	5.4	2.1
Freedom	6.0	2.6	5.6	2.5	4.5	2.5	6.9	2.4	4.6	2.3